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TO ALL DIPLOMATIC AND CONSULAR POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI IMMEDIATE

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TAGS: [AMGT](#) [APER](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: ANNOUNCING THE 2009 IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN CYCLE

REF: A) STATE 36313 B) STATE 24893

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THE ONGOING CALL TO SERVICE  
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¶1. Last year, our Foreign Service and Civil Service colleagues made their considerable talents available in support of our top foreign policy priorities in Iraq and Afghanistan, as we anticipate happening this year. They responded to our Department's call, and volunteers staffed every position in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Secretary is asking that all of us once again consider directly supporting our efforts by volunteering for service in these two countries. Following is the text of a personal message from the Secretary which will be followed by a video to be released early this week (available on BNET and via links on the Assignment-Iraq and Assignment-Afghanistan websites listed in para 13).

¶2. Begin text of Secretary Rice's message:

I want to thank the dedicated men and women of the Department of State, Foreign Service, Civil Service, Locally Employed Staff, and retirees alike, who have stepped forward to serve at our missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. I am proud of their achievements at the forefront of diplomacy and national security, in fulfillment of two of our country's highest foreign policy priorities. I am asking that you consider joining this highly motivated team of professionals as we look for volunteers for positions opening in 2009.

I visit Iraq and Afghanistan on a regular basis and have seen our efforts firsthand. Working closely with other civilian colleagues, our military, and Iraqi and Afghan counterparts from all levels of government and civil society, the Department of State is making a difference in the lives of ordinary people. We are helping to rebuild local and national governments, foster economic development, and promote reconciliation. The results are inspiring.

Our brave volunteers are doing a tough, but necessary, job far away from family and friends. Employees and families deserve the nation's gratitude.

I can assure you that they have mine, and I encourage you to join our teams in Baghdad and Kabul.

End text of the Secretary's Message

¶3. This telegram, which incorporates changes based on last year's assignments cycle, lays out this year's process for filling these two priority posts. Many of the changes are intended to address concerns regarding transparency and accuracy. We are also starting earlier this year in order to give our colleagues additional time to consider volunteering, discuss the issues with their loved ones, and digest the details of the process. We also believe that a more timely assignment process will allow our colleagues to take better advantage of the significantly enhanced Iraq and Afghanistan-related training opportunities being offered by FSI.

¶4. As the Secretary has noted in her message, the dedication of the men and women of the Foreign Service and Civil Service who have already stepped forward is inspiring and she knows that others will join them on the cutting edge of diplomacy. Our decision to staff Iraq and Afghanistan before proceeding to other worldwide assignments, as discussed in Ref A, reflects the vital importance of these two countries to our strategic foreign policy goals. As in the past, we hope to staff both with qualified volunteers.

¶5. With the release of this message, the 2009 vacancies in Iraq and Afghanistan, including out-year language positions with language training included in the tour of duty, will be advertised in FSBid and will be available for immediate assignment for Foreign Service and Civil Service volunteers starting June 10 - two weeks after the positions have been advertised. The Iraq-Afghanistan assignment cycle will last throughout the summer. At the appropriate time, the Director General will consult with the senior leadership of the Department to determine how best to complete the Iraq-Afghanistan assignment cycle prior to the end of September. See para 23 for a timeline for key elements of the Iraq-Afghanistan cycle.

¶6. To facilitate the assignments process this year, employees with the necessary qualifications who bid on stretch or out-of-cone positions in these two countries can also be brought to panel beginning June 10. These provisions allowing immediate consideration of stretch assignments are more flexible than in the regular assignments process and provide employees the opportunity to secure their assignments early in the Iraq-Afghanistan bidding cycle.

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LINKED ASSIGNMENTS  
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¶7. We are also proposing, for Iraq only and pending further discussions with AFSA, that the Department's firm commitment to assigning qualified bidders on PRT positions to one of their top five onward assignments be replaced with a broader version of the successful "linked assignments" program implemented for some grades/cones serving in Iraq last year. Under this proposal a Foreign Service employee may be paneled to his/her onward assignment for 2010 at the same time as he/she is paneled to a 2009 Iraq assignment.

¶8. The senior leadership of the Department has given its support to this proposal and has encouraged the regional and functional bureaus to work in close cooperation with HR/CDA to make it effective. Under this proposal, employees of all cones and specialties may work directly with regional or functional bureaus and their CDOs to formulate linked assignments. All bureaus will make their best efforts to facilitate this process and will provide clear explanations to HR/CDA in cases where a proposed linked assignment is not possible (for example if an employee does not have the necessary qualifications to do the job). HR/CDA and NEA will work actively with bidders and bureaus on these linked assignments and will enlist the support of their leadership where necessary. Both NEA and the other bureau concerned must concur on the proposed link.

¶9. Linked assignments may be made to one-grade stretch positions (up or down) and, for generalists, may be in cone or out of cone assignments. Specialists will generally be expected to look for linked assignments in their areas of specialty. Also, some functional bureaus may not be able to offer a full range of linked assignments due to limited position availability at certain grades. In all cases, however, specialist bureaus will make every effort to accommodate employee preferences for onward assignments, as they have in the past. HR/CDA will support any linked assignment agreed to by both

bureaus and the employee as long as the guidelines regarding grade and cone/specialty are met. In addition:

-- Employees will be responsible for initiating the search for a linked assignment. Unlike last year, bureaus have not been asked to select specific positions as potential linked assignments. Instead employees interested in linking should check bureau web pages for lists of projected vacancies and contact bureau EX offices or desks to discuss options. CDA will have links available to those bureaus with projected vacancies sites.

-- Linked assignments to DCM and PO positions will not be available.

-- Should agreement on linked assignments prove to be unobtainable between NEA and the other bureaus, the employee's bid on Iraq will not be retained unless he or she wishes to proceed without a linked assignment (or agrees to a different linked assignment option).

-- This incentive will be available to employees who volunteer for Iraq service by August 1, 2008.

¶10. Note that this proposal to expand the option for linked assignments is currently being discussed with AFSA and we hope to update the Foreign Service shortly to confirm the status of this program and provide further details.

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TARGETED RECRUITMENT EFFORT  
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¶11. The recruitment effort this year is beginning earlier and will be even more proactive and targeted than in the past. HR/CDA is reviewing the list of eligible 2009 bidders to find those who are particularly well-qualified to staff key positions in Iraq. We will inform those individuals in the coming days that they are part of a pool of the best qualified potential bidders who will be the primary (but not exclusive) focus of recruitment efforts for Iraq. In addition, should the DG determine that identification procedures need to be used later in the cycle to staff unfilled positions, these individuals will also comprise the primary pool for identification. We will actively encourage them over the coming months to bid on those positions in Iraq for which they are particularly well qualified. We repeat, however, that this is not the only group from which we will recruit for Iraq or from which we will accept bids. The entire Foreign and Civil Services have a robust pool of talented individuals who have much to offer through service in Iraq and also in Afghanistan.

¶12. The list of positions for which we sought particularly well qualified bidders and the criteria we considered in assessing employee qualifications is available through the links on the newly-created HR/CDA webpage:

([http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/cda/iraq\\_afghanistan/](http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/cda/iraq_afghanistan/))

The criteria include factors such as the employee's grade, cone, language ability (where relevant) and grade-appropriate experience for a particular job. We have not included in this review those employees with other than class one or class two medical clearances. We recognize, of course, that some of those who have the requisite skills for a given position may also have unique situations, apart from medical restrictions, that could make it difficult for them to serve in Iraq. However, it is not necessary now for officers who are informed that they are among the best qualified for a given position to send personal statements or take any other action during the recruitment period.

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BIDDING MECHANICS: STRETCHES, PROMOTIONS, DCM/PO BIDDERS  
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¶13. To assist those bidding, we have updated the "Assignment~Iraq" website:

([http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/dg/assignment\\_iraq/](http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/dg/assignment_iraq/))

and created an "Assignment~Afghanistan" website:

([http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/dg/assignment\\_afghanistan/](http://hrweb.hr.state.gov/prd/hrweb/dg/assignment_afghanistan/))

as well. HR has also placed information about specific positions on the HR/CDA webpage listed above under "Iraq/Afghanistan Cycle." All three of these web pages will be "live" as of OOB Washington on May 27.

¶14. The current Iraq and Afghanistan Service Recognition Packages will be released septel. In the interest of transparency and to assist our colleagues in their decision making, HR/CDA will also release via FSBid the complete Open Assignments 2009 Summer Cycle in early July to allow everyone to see the full range of available 2009 assignment options as they consider bids on Iraq and Afghanistan. FSBid also contains an Iraq/Afghanistan 2009 cycle with all jobs advertised. Position descriptions and language designations are included. The jobs and their position descriptions together with additional resource material have also been posted on the intranet HR/CDA webpage noted above to make it easier for colleagues to access and review them. To place bids or to determine whether or not a particular job remains vacant, please use FSBid. If FSBid is not accessible, a bidder should contact his/her CDO via fax or e-mail, requesting that a bid be entered on his/her behalf. Civil Service colleagues should express their initial interest in Iraq or Afghanistan assignments to NEA (Laura Starr - StarrLE@state.gov; Tony Spakauskas - SpakauskasA2@state.gov ) or SCA (Sumera Ashruf - AshrufSX@state.gov; Jane Ross - RossJS@state.gov ) for consideration.

¶15. HR/CDA recognizes that the Iraq and Afghanistan timeline will require employees to make decisions on bidding jobs in those countries before promotions are announced, before bids in the regular cycle are due, and before DCM/PO committees have met. If a volunteer for Iraq or Afghanistan is promoted and wishes to look at a different position in either country or at their linked assignment, HR/CDA, and the concerned bureaus will work to meet the needs of newly-promoted employees on a case-by-case basis. Also, as noted above, stretch assignments for bidders with the necessary qualifications for the positions will be considered from the start of the cycle.

¶16. Bidders who wish to compete for DCM/PO positions for 2009 should be aware that those positions will almost certainly not be reviewed by the DCM committee prior to the completion of the Iraq/Afghanistan Cycle. They should also be aware that if they are assigned to Iraq or Afghanistan during the cycle, those assignments will take priority over their DCM bids. We recognize that this may make for difficult choices for some bidders, but we nonetheless strongly encourage officers bidding DCM/PO positions to give very careful consideration to assignments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The significant responsibilities and high profile of many of these positions are career enhancing and could strengthen your qualifications for a DCM/PO position in 2010.

¶17. Fair share bidders are strongly encouraged to consider service in Iraq and Afghanistan. As an added incentive, the regular season assignment rules that require a bidder to bid exclusively on domestic jobs or be subject to fair share bidding rules will not apply to bids on the Iraq/Afghanistan Cycle. Submitting a bid on Iraq or Afghanistan positions does not preclude bidding exclusively on domestic jobs in the Regular Cycle. Should you choose to bid overseas in the Regular Cycle, any bids submitted in

this cycle can be considered a part of meeting fair share bidding requirements in the regular season. As with all fair share bids, they must be replenished as the Iraq/Afghanistan positions you bid are filled.

¶18. In regard to medical clearances, we urge colleagues interested in volunteering to serve in Iraq or Afghanistan to update their medical clearances as soon as possible.

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ONWARD ASSIGNMENTS FOR THOSE SERVING IN IRAQ/AFGHANISTAN  
2008-2009  
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¶19. In order to fulfill our obligation to employees who will be serving in Iraq and Afghanistan starting in summer 2008, we will allow them to accept handshakes on Open Assignment Cycle positions for 2009 as soon as those jobs are advertised in July. As "differential bidders," these employees may receive handshakes for a one-grade stretch position. Furthermore, given that senior promotions will almost certainly not be released prior to bidding by officers serving in Afghanistan and Iraq, we will allow FS-01 bidders in Iraq or Afghanistan to accept a handshake for an OC position pending release of the promotion lists. If the bidder is not promoted, however, they will require a senior cede in accordance with current procedures, before their bid can be considered further. Iraq/Afghanistan service will, however, be taken into account as a positive factor when reviewing the request for a senior cede.

¶20. Employees serving in an Iraq PRT in 2008-2009 still have the Department's firm commitment to assigning them to one of their top five at-grade, in-cone choices. HR must be in receipt of your job preferences before the Open Assignment Cycle begins in October in order to ensure that other employees are not paneled to the jobs. Further information on this process will be provided by your CDOs in the near future.

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CONTACT HR/CDA WITH QUESTIONS  
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¶21. We hope that this cable will be a helpful first step in our effort to inform all our colleagues about the details of the Iraq-Afghanistan cycle. Please do not hesitate to contact your CDO or any of us in HR/CDA with any questions. HR/CDA is also willing to arrange DVCs with posts abroad or group discussions with colleagues in Washington as requested.

¶22. We appreciate and respect the service of those of our colleagues who have already served in Iraq and Afghanistan. This year many more of us will join those ranks. We hope that once again we will be able to demonstrate in a concrete way that we know our duty and, as members of the career Foreign Service, have stepped forward in service to our nation.

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TIMELINE  
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¶23. Iraq-Afghanistan Assignments Timeline:

May 27 - Release of cable announcing Iraq-Afghanistan cycle and opening of cycle positions in FSBID.

May 29 - Well-qualified candidates will be contacted and urged to volunteer.

June 2 - Release of cable with Iraq and Afghanistan Service Recognition Packages.

June 10 - Assignments of Iraq or Afghanistan volunteers begin.

July 1 - Release of Open Assignment 2009 positions in  
FSBid.

September - Completion of Iraq and Afghanistan Assignment  
Cycle.

October 1 - Start of 2009 Open Assignments Cycle.

¶24. MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.  
RICE